

VU Research Portal

Not a piece of cake

Moser, C.

2013

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Moser, C. (2013). *Not a piece of cake: What makes online communities work*. [PhD-Thesis - Research and graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam]. VU University.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

SUMMARY

Not a piece of cake – What makes online communities work?

How do online communities work? Online communities are one of the most important vehicles for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and innovation. Yet, scholars and managers have very little understanding of what makes online communities ‘work’. In times of open innovation, growing costs of labour and research, global mobility, and overall pressure on organizational performance, it becomes increasingly important to shed light on the phenomenon of knowledge sharing in online communities. This research is based on an extensive multi-method case study of an online community of cake decorators using interview, survey, archival and observation data, and employing quantitative (statistical and network analysis) and qualitative (content analysis) methods. I find that how online communities work is far from being ‘a piece of cake’. Rather, organizing structures in these communities seem to be multi-faceted and fuelled by complex social interactions.

The findings of this dissertation demonstrate that organizing structures in online communities can be understood in terms of communicative genres. This means that organizing structures are intangible and informal in nature, as opposed to formal organizing structures in traditional organizations. Such informal structures call for strategies and managerial actions that correspond with these structures. Furthermore, I examine similarities and differences between two online communities from two different contexts, the Netherlands and Germany. Although featuring many similarities, the two groups also differ. For example, members of the German online community use the online platform mainly to gather information, whereas the Dutch report to value the social environment

most. This is surprising, as most research up until now assumed generally applicable organizing structures. Finally, I connect structural and individual approaches toward online community research by explaining how processes of entrepreneurship evolve in the online community context. I demonstrate that participation in an online community is important during processes of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs, for example, use the community's technical affordances to gain access to information, and its social affordances to build a large network.

My dissertation highlights that our prior knowledge and theory stemming from 'offline' community research might have to be revisited for an 'online' context. Based on findings from this research, organizations will better be able to tap into resources that online communities typically foster in abundance, such as relevant and timely information and knowledge, access to social networks, and a voluntary 'workforce' of participants who enjoy to hand out advice.